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Ontario Academic Courses: English

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Rationale

The three Ontario Academic Courses (OACs) in English are intended primarily for students who plan to go to university, both for those who will take English courses there and those who will not. It is important that these students develop certain capabilities, attitudes, and skills if they are to be successful in their further education. The OACs in English are designed to foster intellectual curiosity, enthusiasm for reading, appreciation of literature, analytical and critical thought, and effective writing. The mental processes involved in students' academic learning, therefore, are as important as the particular content of textbooks and units of study.

The principles underlying the OACs are an extension of the principles already set out in the curriculum guidelines *English, Intermediate Division, 1977* and *English, Senior Division, 1977*. However, there are some significant differences in emphasis and focus.

Students taking OACs are at an important stage in their personal development, a stage that will continue in their university years and beyond.

OACs refine and extend skills and knowledge in the following areas:

- speaking and writing proficiency;
- response to literature and the articulation of this response;
- enjoyment and appreciation of literature and the development of a reading habit;
- understanding of language, its nature and functions;
- independence in reading, thought, and expression.

Objectives

Since thinking informs all of the language processes and language is a prime determiner of thought, students taking OACs are expected to acquire the ability to:

- develop insights and see connections and relationships;
- formulate hypotheses and explore their implications;
- detect fallacies in reasoning;
- support a position with convincing evidence.

Because much important learning takes place through listening and speaking, these activities are an integral part of the OAC curriculum. Students are expected to:

- listen with discrimination for point of view and bias;
- listen for main ideas and valid evidence;
- understand and appreciate the link between sound and sense;
- articulate ideas with clarity, conviction, and confidence;
- organize and present ideas in language appropriate to the audience and occasion.

The OACs are designed to be a bridge between the highly directed reading that students may have experienced in earlier courses and the independent reading required in university. In the OACs, students are expected to:

- read widely and critically;
- read accurately for various purposes and at various speeds;
- read with curiosity;
- read to understand and appreciate various genres.

The ability to express thought effectively in standard written English ranks very high among the abilities needed for success in university. In the OACs, students must:

- write frequent, short papers and revise and edit their writing to the point where it is polished;
- write "in role", that is, take a position and advance a reasoned argument;
- write short expository essays and write in other modes, for various purposes, and for different audiences.

Prerequisites and Course Planning

Students taking the first OAC in English must have successfully completed *at least* one advanced-level Senior English course.

The first OAC is the core course, and students taking one OAC will take this course. Thus, students entering university with an English course will have completed the same core requirements. For many, this will be their last formal study of English.

The second OAC, an option after, or concurrent with, OAC I, is designed primarily as a writer's workshop, and the third, also an option after OAC I, has as its focus the study of literature in depth. Students may count up to three OACs in English towards their OSSD.

When a school offers one OAC in English, it must be OAC I: Language and Literature. In addition, either OAC II or OAC III, or both, may be offered. Each of these courses carries a value of one credit. The OACs permit flexibility in the selection of texts from school to school, and even from class to class within a school.

Each of the three courses will be required to have the following:

- a literature component;
- a language component, incorporating the study of structure and style and linked to the literature component in each course;
- an independent-study unit;
- a writing folder.

While specific texts are not prescribed provincially, the content selected for the OACs must be:

- chosen for literary quality and for variety in style, genre, and theme;
- chosen to avoid overlap among the three OACs;
- selected in light of students' reading throughout secondary programs, with a view to overall balance in their experiences with literature, including Canadian literature and literature from different time periods;
- limited by the demands of the writing program, although much extensive reading will be expected;
- adapted, as necessary, for students identified by an Identification, Placement, and Review Committee (IPRC) as exceptional and for whom alternative programs have been planned.

Content

The following three OACs in English are described on the following pages:

- OAC I: Language and Literature
- OAC II: Writer's Craft
- OAC III: Studies in Literature

OAC I: Language and Literature

Literature. The content studied must include the following:

- essays, past and present, chosen not only for literary merit but also as incentives for discussion and writing; the content should involve the concerns of a variety of disciplines;
- a balanced selection of poems, prose fiction, and plays, including acknowledged classics.

Language. The course will include the following aspects of language study:

- language work needed to develop students' writing skills; such areas as usage and spelling should be directly related to the writer's needs as demonstrated in his or her actual writing;
- an examination of the usage, structure, and style of the literature selections for the course, including a consideration of audience, purpose, tone, and the use of rhetorical devices;
- techniques of effective oral and written expression.

Writing folder. In this course, writing, including pre- and post-writing activities, must make up at least one-third of the class time.

The writing folder will contain many samples of writing in various modes, for various purposes, and for real and imagined audiences. Much of the writing will consist of short expository essays. The folder should also contain some of the following: descriptions, reports, summaries, poems, narratives, letters, scripts, short research papers, and case studies.

Independent study. Topics should be developed from students' interests, in consultation with the teacher. They should arise out of the literature at hand or from the wide reading encouraged in the course. The various stages of each student's project should be carefully monitored; records of discussions and conferences, interview logs, and working plans and the like should be kept and should enter into the overall evaluation of student achievement. The independent-study unit in OAC I will culminate in a formal report that includes an oral and a written component.

OAC II: Writer's Craft

Literature. The content studied must include the following:

- many short literary selections (essays, stories, one-act plays, poems, excerpts from longer works), chosen as appropriate samples of the writer's craft;
- articles about writing by writers (theory and practice).

Language. The course will include the following aspects of language study:

- language work needed to develop students' writing skills; such areas as usage and spelling should be directly related to the writer's needs as demonstrated in his or her actual writing;
- an examination of usage, structure, and style, including the identification of audience and purpose, the study of techniques of development, and rhetorical devices;
- language as it applies to writing, including the language of specialized areas (e.g., business, politics, advertising, sports) and the language of various genres and media (e.g., dialogues, scripts, speeches, and debates for oral delivery).

Writing folder. In this course, writing, including pre- and post-writing activities, must make up at least one-half of the class time. Students should be encouraged to take advantage of word-processing facilities, where available.

The writing folder will contain many samples of writing in various modes, for various purposes, and for various audiences. Much of the writing will be exposition. The folder should also contain many of the following: descriptions, poems, reports, summaries, short stories, children's stories, fables, scripts, and speeches.

Independent study. The independent-study topics should arise from students' interests. The development of the student's expertise in the craft of writing and the various stages of each project should be carefully monitored; records of discussions and conferences, interview logs, and working plans and the like should be kept and should enter into the overall evaluation of student achievement. The independent-study unit in OAC II should culminate in a paper involving original work, such as a short story or a script, or the analysis of the style and structure of a work of literature. If an original work is intended for a non-print medium, its final form should, where possible, be presented in the medium for which it was written: a radio script becomes a tape; a dramatization becomes a play performance or a videotape.

OAC III: Studies in Literature

Literature. This course is intended for students with a special interest in English and should acquaint them with literature drawn from various time periods. It should include the study, in depth, of a balanced selection of poetry, prose, and drama chosen from at least two areas of study such as the following:

- archetypal patterns
- satire
- science fiction
- literature of a specific period
- Canadian literature
- children's literature
- themes in literature

Language. The course will include the following aspects of language study:

- language work needed to develop students' writing skills; such areas as usage and spelling should be directly related to the writer's needs as demonstrated in his or her actual writing;
- an examination of the relationship of usage, structure, and style to their context in the literature selections, including the study of techniques of development and rhetorical devices;
- the craft of language, as exemplified in the literature.

Writing folder. In this course, writing, including pre- and post-writing activities, must make up at least one-quarter of the class time.

The writing folder will contain many samples of writing in various modes, for various purposes, and for various audiences. Most of the writing will be exposition. There should also be some of the following: narratives, poems, summaries, descriptions, scripts, and parodies.

Independent study. Topics should grow from the literature or language studied. The various stages of each student's project should be carefully monitored; records of discussions and conferences, interview logs, and working plans and the like should be kept and should enter into the overall evaluation of student achievement. The independent-study unit in OAC III should culminate in a literary essay and an oral presentation.

Learning Experiences

The approaches to student learning recommended in Ministry of Education guidelines and support documents continue to apply to the OACs. In particular, the following should be regarded as essential to success at this level:

- Students need to realize that reading is a complex process involving more than the understanding of content, and that the "meaning" of a literary text is inseparable from its embodiment in language.
- Students must work through much of the writing process in class: preliminary discussion, initial draft, peer and teacher reactions, revision, editing, and final draft. Each student will maintain a writing folder, which, by the end of OAC I, will contain six to eight samples of polished writing; in the other two courses, the folder will contain a number of samples of polished writing proportionate to the time prescribed for writing.
- Students need the experience of reading extensively as well as intensively. When students are reading extensively, they will require direction in focusing on important aspects of the work and in making notes.
- Students must have experience in organizing and executing a significant amount of work independently. They will need class time in the planning and working stages for conferring with their teacher. Teachers and students should seek the assistance of the teacher-librarian, where necessary.
- Students need the experience both of peer and self-evaluation in their day-to-day work and of writing examinations under time constraints.
- Students need frequent, structured opportunities for speaking and listening (e.g., oral presentations, small-group discussions, seminars).

Teaching Strategies

The OACs require that students become increasingly adept at thinking and working independently. Teaching strategies must therefore be structured and sequenced to give students more and more responsibility for their own learning and to lead them to make wise use of the resources available, especially their teachers and peers.

Of particular importance is independent study, which counts for 20 per cent of students' marks in each course. Teachers must ensure that students plan and execute a substantial unit of work under close supervision. In evaluating this unit, teachers must consider the process as well as the final product.

The objectives related to thinking stress how to think rather than what to think. They call for students to think for themselves by engaging in a critical examination of literature. Teachers must refrain from thinking for students (e.g., by providing detailed study notes and guides) and should discourage them from relying uncritically on secondary sources for their ideas. It is important that students in OACs have ample opportunity to develop the high-level thinking skills of analysis, synthesis, and evaluation.

The speaking and listening objectives require that students work frequently with partners or in small groups, present their findings to the class, and evaluate their own work and that of their peers. The teacher's role is to ensure the smooth functioning of the process.

The reading objectives underline the importance of this activity both inside and outside the classroom. Teachers must provide students with varied reading assignments. In handling longer works of literature, teachers should balance close textual analysis with extensive treatment. An inordinate amount of class time (i.e., twenty hours or more) must not be devoted to a single work.

The writing objectives reflect the emphasis on students' thinking for themselves. Students must have practice in formulating and developing hypotheses. Frequent, short assignments (600-800 words) are preferable to a few long assignments. A literary essay in an independent-study unit (maximum 1500 words) should be the longest essay in the OACs. Assignments that require students to attend closely to a text are more appropriate than lengthy literary research essays (e.g., those of about 3000 words) that rely heavily on secondary sources. This does not preclude students' locating, summarizing, and commenting on information from a variety of sources.

Evaluation

The OACs will be the most rigorous of the English courses in a secondary school. To a great extent their integrity depends on policies and procedures that result in sound assessment and evaluation. To maintain the emphasis and focus of each course, teachers will need to be consistent in their assessment strategies.

To be consistent with the allocation of available instructional time and with the course objectives, the evaluation in each OAC must be proportioned as follows to allow for the assessment of both oral and written work:

- written examination(s) ..... 30 per cent
- prepared writing kept in writing folder ... 30 per cent
- other class work, including oral work .... 20 per cent
- independent study (oral and written components) ..... 20 per cent

All students must write at least one examination in each course, except for students identified by an IPRC as exceptional and for whom alternative evaluation procedures have been established.

Assessment procedures must require students to apply concepts rather than merely recall content. Examinations should thus reflect the course objectives by having students use high-level thinking skills, develop a position, select evidence, and write effectively.

An important medium for the assessment of writing competency at this level is the expository essay, which requires the student to develop a position with a logical and convincing organization of ideas and evidence. The assessment instruments and strategies for the independent-study unit may be set up in consultation with the student and must be carefully considered to ensure high-quality results. Similarly, teachers within a department should work together on strategies for assessing the contents of the cumulative writing folder.

Where a letter-grade system is used, it will be based on the following scale:

A – 80-100 per cent

B – 70-79 per cent

C – 60-69 per cent

D – 50-59 per cent

F – 0-49 per cent

An A indicates superior performance for a student in the OAC English program; B reflects a good performance; C indicates a satisfactory performance; D is a passing grade; and F indicates a failing grade. The A range is large, and superior students who meet and exceed all of the criteria at that level should receive a mark in the 90-100 per cent range. Students who do not achieve the standard required for a passing grade (i.e., 50 per cent), as set out in the course objectives, must not be given an OAC credit in English.

Specific criteria for various types of assessment are found in the following ministry documents: *Evaluation of Student Achievement: A Resource Guide for Teachers, 1976; English, Senior Division, 1977; Evaluation and the English Program, English Intermediate Division, 1979;* and *English: A Resource Guide for the Senior Division, 1980.* For purposes of checking standards and criteria within a school or board, holistic-marking workshops are recommended. Information on holistic marking is available in some of the ministry documents mentioned above and in the OAIP material developed for Intermediate Division English.

Suggested Resources

This section includes a few titles that may be of use to teachers at the OAC level. The following resources could be studied for form, style, content, organization, purpose, and language use:

- book reviews from various newspapers;
- film reviews and critiques;
- editorials and articles from various newspapers and high-quality magazines;
- reports and letters from or to various companies, associations, corporations, and social organizations for a variety of purposes.

Student Texts

The following texts are listed on *Circular 14* at the Senior or Honour Graduation level and have material that is relevant to the OACs. The OAC to which each is pertinent is given at the end of the listing.

Dawe, Alan. *Copyright Canada: A Prose Rhetoric and Sampler.* Toronto: Gage, 1978. Examines basic essay structure and exposition of various kinds (including the literary-insight paper, the report, the letter to the editor, the review) and contains models of student writing and composition assignments. OAC I

King, D., and Crerar, T. *A Choice of Words.* Toronto: Oxford University Press, 1969. Examines literature and the study of language in context; contains literary models and exercises, with chapters on meaning and context, denotation, connotation, metaphor, and irony. The chapter on denotation has a small section on the growth of the English language. OAC III

Larock, M.; Tressler, J.; and Lewis, C. *Mastering Effective English.* 4th ed. Toronto: Copp Clark Pitman, 1980. The first chapter has a small section on the evolution of the English language and Canadian vs. British language. OAC III

McConnell, Ruth E. *Our Own Voice: Canadian English and How It Is Studied.* Toronto: Gage, 1979. Intended as a resource book of ideas and information for students, this text contains material on British, Canadian, and American English; how Canadians make words; language and dialect; and regional variations in Canada. OAC I

Parker, John F. *The Writer's Workshop.* Toronto: Addison-Wesley, 1982. Presents ideas for workshop arrangements and small-group work, and contains varied assignments. OAC II

Penner, P.G., and McConnell, R.E. *Language on Paper: Writing Systems, English Punctuation, English Spelling.* Toronto: Macmillan, 1977. The first third of the book is devoted to writing systems, including pictographs, the syllable system, the alphabet system, print, typefaces, and special systems of writing. OAC II

Stewart, K.L., and Freeman, M.E. *Essay Writing for Canadian Students.* Toronto: Prentice-Hall, 1981. Contains detailed instruction in how to write essays, including personal essays and persuasive essays. OAC I and III

Student Reference

Northey, Margot. *Making Sense: A Student's Guide to Writing and Style.* Toronto: Oxford University Press, 1983. A student handbook on writing essays, reports of various kinds (including science and business), and the essay examination. It contains material on plain English and concise writing.

Teacher References

Case, Robbie. *Reading Critically.* Toronto: OISE, 1981. Designed to help students in the Senior Division to read in a critical and objective fashion, this book has a wide variety of prose samples (particularly persuasive arguments) and exercises.

Conrad, Ronald. *The Act of Writing: Canadian Essays for Composition.* Toronto: McGraw-Hill Ryerson, 1983. Essays for reading and study, with questions on structure, style, and ideas. Topics for writing are included at the end of each unit.

Cooper, Charles R., and Odell, Lee, eds. *Research on Composing: Points of Departure.* Urbana, Ill.: National Council of Teachers of English, 1978. See chapter 3: James Britton, "The Composing Processes and the Functions of Writing"; chapter 5: Janet Emig, "Hand, Eye, Brain: Some 'Basics' in the Writing Process"; and chapter 7: Donald Murray, "Internal Revision: A Process of Discovery".

Donovan, T.R., and McClelland, B.W. *Eight Approaches to Teaching Composition.* Urbana, Ill.: National Council of Teachers of English, 1980. Eight major papers dealing with such topics as writing as process, the prose models approach, the rhetorical approach, the writing conference, and writing in the total curriculum.

National Association of Secondary School Principals. *Writing in the Schools: Improvement Through Effective Leadership.* Reston, Va.: NASSP, 1981. Principals and superintendents will find this handbook useful for evaluating English programs and for assessing language-across-the-curriculum policies. It outlines activities and strategies that should be used in the classroom.

Ontario, Ministry of Education. *English: A Resource Guide for the Senior Division.* Toronto: Ministry of Education, Ontario, 1980.

Weaver, Constance. *Grammar for Teachers: Perspectives and Definitions.* Urbana, Ill.: National Council of Teachers of English, 1979. Provides a foundation in three systematic grammars – traditional, structural, and transformational. Grammar is presented not as an isolated activity, but as a means of improving students' abilities in writing, as well as listening, speaking, and reading.

Evaluation

Board of Education for the City of North York. *A Marked Improvement: Evaluation of Written English in Secondary Schools*. Toronto: Board of Education for the City of North York, 1982. Includes a checklist for designing effective writing assignments, as well as practical advice for English departments on setting up holistic-marking workshops in order to clarify their evaluation procedures and standards.

Cooper, C.R., ed. *The Nature and Measurement of Competency*. Urbana, Ill.: National Council of Teachers of English, 1981. See chapter 2 by John Mellon for a comprehensive review of the best current research and theory on language acquisition, development, and use; chapter 3 by Alan Purves for material on the limitations of various tests of reading ability and a proposed four-part competency test which would use the best available formats; and chapter 4 by Lee Odell for a theory-based approach for assessing writing competency.

Cooper, C.R., and Odell, Lee, eds. *Evaluating Writing: Describing, Measuring, Judging*. Urbana, Ill.: National Council of Teachers of English, 1977. Contains material on measuring growth in writing by holistic scoring, primary-trait scoring, computer-aided word counts of mature word choices, the assessment of syntactic structures, and measurement based on changes in students' intellectual processes.

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